



Outside-The-Box College Accommodations Real Support for Real Students

Tools for School II

Tip Sheet 11

Transitions RTC

March 2017

Students who have a mental health condition may need additional support to help them do the best they can in school and work. The “American with Disabilities Act” (ADA) entitles students with disabilities, like mental health conditions, to get academic help with academic accommodations and other legal rights.

Most schools are used to providing typical accommodations such as: note taker, extra time for assignments, and assistive technology for students of many different disabilities. Yet, the challenges of having a mental health condition are unique.



This tip sheet will help you to think “outside-the-box” to get the educational accommodations that help you with your unique struggles.

What Are Academic Accommodations Anyway?

Academic accommodations are like any other helping tool, like an audio book or a calculator. They are changes in how you participate in your courses. When considering the accommodation, you need think about things like:

- Where you take your test or where you sit in class
- How information is given to you (recorded audio, written notes, visual presentations, etc)
- How you work with students or how you respond to being called upon
- Extended or broken-up time for in-class work, tests, projects, and/or homework

Important to Note

Academic Accommodations are not the same as modifications. This means that they are not a change in the curriculum of the class or how you are graded. They are more of a change in how you do the same work so that you have the same opportunity that everyone else has regardless of your mental health condition or other disability.

Learn about the basics of accommodations and how to get them, see our “Tools for School” tipsheet:

<http://escholarship.umassmed.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1066&context=pib>

Outside-The-Box Educational Accommodations

The following table contains some examples of educational accommodations that may be helpful to the unique challenges of having a mental health condition:

Advance Warning or “Pre-Processing”	<p>If classes make you nervous, it may help if the professor lays out what is going to happen at the start of class. This allows for “pre-processing” so that you can prepare mentally for what’s to come, easing any anxiety about not being prepared for class.</p>
Broken Time	<p>If you struggle with having to focus for a long period of time, a “broken time” accommodation may help. “Broken time” is different from “extended time.” Having “extended time” involves having 150% of the time originally given to take an exam, or some call it, “time and a half.” In “broken time,” you work for a period of time on classwork, an in-class essay or exam, during which you are allowed to take short breaks. You spend the same amount of time on the activity as everyone else, but the time is just broken up. Taking a break can refresh and reorient your mind, allowing you to better focus on the activity. This way whatever time you spend feeling anxious or distracted will not count towards your total time given.</p>
Professors Limiting or Changing the Way Demand Responses are Requested	<p>Being called upon in class or “demand responses”, can cause a lot of anxiety. Limiting being called upon in class unless your hand is raised can be requested as an accommodation. If the professor has established a need for in-class participation that counts towards your grade, the accommodation can be that the professor prepares the student before calling on them in class so that the student has time to ready themselves.</p>
Reframing Participation Questions or In-Class Feedback	<p>Professors can “reframe” questions in order to help you give a clearer, more correct, or specific answer while participating in class. If a discussion in class needs to be cut short because of time, but you still need further explanation, you can request that the professor meets with you after class.</p>
Reducing Distraction	<p>Finding classes with a small number of students can help if you struggle with concentration. If the school can’t provide a smaller class, you may be accommodated by having a reserved seat at the very front of the class.</p>

So How Do I Figure Out Which Accommodations Work Best for Me?

Your campus disability services office (or accessibility office) is where you go to ask for accommodations and they can sometimes help you think about the different ones you'd like to try. The person who knows you and your challenges best is you. What are your strengths and struggles? Also, it is very important to have a group of people that know you and support you so that they can help you figure out what support(s) you might need to achieve your goals.



The following are some tips to keep in mind while requesting accommodations:

- Work with your support network to talk about your needs and how your challenges affect you in the classroom, on campus, during examinations, and while you are working.
- Your support people cannot request an accommodation for you at your school's Disability Services Office, but they can go with you if you need an advocate or a companion as you request the accommodations you need.
- Talk to your doctor about your strengths but also your challenges in school. They will need to write a letter that describes the specific ways your condition affects your ability to learn in college.
- Contact the disability services within your school, remember these services are there to make sure they provide you with the best solutions. On the first day of classes, professors usually provide information about how to contact them in the course syllabus.
- Work with your professors and your school to understand their requirements from you as a student.

Don't miss our Comeback TV episode Outside-the-Box Accommodations in College, Part 1

In this episode, Gus has a special guest, Laura DiGalbo, to talk about college accommodations and some advice on how to get them in a way that will really support college students with mental health lived experience.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VivSnSNXXE>



Resources

Wagner, M., & Newman, L. (2012). Longitudinal transition outcomes of youth with emotional disturbances. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 35(3), 199-208. doi: 10.2975/35.3.2012.199.208

Souma, A., Rockerson, N., & Burgstahler, S. (2012). DO-IT. Academic Accommodations for Students with Psychiatric Disabilities. Retrieved November 3, 2016 <http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/psych.html>.

Costa, A. (2011). Tools for School: Accommodations for College Students with Mental Health Challenges, Tip Sheet 2. Worcester, MA: University of Massachusetts Medical School, Department of Psychiatry, Systems and Psychosocial Advances Research Center (SPARC), Transitions Research and Training Center.

More information available at:

- <http://escholarship.umassmed.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1066&context=pib>
- <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/executive-functioning-issues/key-executive-functioning-skills-explained>
- https://web.wpi.edu/Images/CMS/SDCC/SSN_Manual_B2010_NO_NAMES.pdf



We'd like to give a special thanks to Laura DiGalbo for her expertise and the information she shared with us during her recent webinar, "Tools for School-College Accommodations for Students with Psychiatric Disabilities," which also informed this tip sheet. Laura DiGalbo has worked in the fields of Rehabilitation & Education for over 30 years in Connecticut. Laura is currently an adjunct faculty at Central Connecticut State University and has particular interest in the retention of college students, including those with psychiatric disabilities, who may need help coping with the rigor of college coursework.

If you'd like to contact Ms. DiGalbo at her practice, please e-mail her at ldgalbo@aol.com. For more information about her work, please visit <http://www2.ccsu.edu/faculty/DiGalbol>.



Suggested Citation: DiGalbo, L., Logan, D., Duperoy, T. & Smith, T. (2017). Outside-The-Box Accommodations: Real Support for Real Students, Tools for School II. Worcester, MA: University of Massachusetts Medical School, Department of Psychiatry, Systems and Psychosocial Advances Research Center (SPARC), Transitions Research and Training Center.

This publication can be made available in alternative formats upon request through TransitionsRTC@umassmed.edu

The contents of this tip sheet were developed under a grant with funding from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, and from the Center for Mental Health Services of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, United States Department of Health and Human Services (ACL Grant# 90RT5031, The Learning and Working Transitions RRTC). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this tip sheet do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, HHS, or SAMHSA and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

